

In Depth: Certified Animal Welfare Approved by A Greener World



AWA Case Studies

This section provides background on Certified Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) by A Greener World (AGW) and an overview of AGW's:

- Standards
- Certification process
- Audit process
- Label use guidelines
- Marketing support
- Costs

AWA Background

Mission. AWA is a program of A Greener World (AGW) whose goal is to improve farm animal welfare by certifying family farmers who adhere to what AGW describes as “the highest animal welfare and environmental standards.” According to AGW, “[t]he way we raise our animals, the nutritional quality of the meat, milk and eggs they produce, and the impact of farming systems on the environment, are all intrinsically linked.” AGW describes itself as promoting animal welfare, the environment and public health.

History. The Animal Welfare Institute created AWA in 2006. In 2014, AGW took over responsibility for the program. AGW is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which also manages the certifications Certified Grassfed by AGW and Certified Non-GMO. Notably, AWA is the only animal welfare certification program accredited as meeting the requirements of the International Organization for Standardization’s ISO/IEC 17065, which sets forth requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services.



For Family Farmers. AGW certifies and audits independent family farmers and cooperatives and producer groups of family farmers. It also certifies marketing groups, distributors, retailers and restaurants. AGW defines a “cooperative” as “a group of farmers who work together and market all their produce under one name or brand, mutually benefiting from the profits.” It defines a “producer group” as “a group of farmers who work together but market some of their produce independently of other farmers in the group.”

Standards. According to AGW, “[t]he basic premise of all the standards is that animals must be able to behave naturally and be in a state of physical and psychological well-being.” In turn, as discussed in detail below, AWA’s standards cover birth through slaughter and require that animals have continuous access to pasture or range.

Animals covered. AWA’s standards cover the following animals:

- Bison
- Beef and dairy cows
- Broiler chickens
- Laying hens
- Meat and dairy goats
- Pigs
- Meat and dairy sheep
- Turkeys
- Ducks
- Geese



Where Sold. Certified AWA products can be found for sale on farms and at farmers markets, restaurants and in retail stores. See [AWA Product Search](#) for more information.

Looking Forward. In addition to Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW, A Greener World also offers Certified Grassfed by AGW and Certified Non-GMO by AGW labels, optional additional accreditations for AWA farmers. Certified Grassfed certified that ruminant animals are fed a 100% grass and forage diet and Certified Non-GMO certifies that food products are produced without the use of genetically engineered feed, supplements or ingredients. These certifications can be audited during the AWA visit, which can add value to farm products while minimizing time spent on auditing. A Greener World’s labels continue to achieve high regard among consumers, with a recent Hartman Group survey finding that AWA has the highest impact on consumer purchasing of any food label.

AWA STANDARDS

Each certification program covered in this guide requires compliance with standards covering various aspects of farm animal husbandry. Below is an overview of how AGW develops its standards; which stages of life AWA's standards cover; and AWA's record-keeping requirements. To review all AWA standards, visit animalwelfareapproved.us.

Standards Development

AGW states that it developed its standards in collaboration with scientists, farmers and farm animal welfare experts from around the world. A Standards Board reviews AWA's standards annually and periodically revises them. For more information on the standards development process, read the AWA Policy Manual (Part 1.14).

Stages of Life Covered

AWA's standards cover birth through death, including breeding, hatching, weaning, on farm life, transport and slaughter. While all the standards are worth reading, AWA's breeding and transport/slaughter standards are key to address right off the bat. Producers must ensure that they have a compliant source for their animals and either find a slaughterhouse that's already Certified AWA, or work with their current slaughterhouse to get certified.

Record-Keeping Requirements

AWA's record-keeping requirements are in place to allow auditors to review what has occurred on the farm in between audits. Farmers are allowed one year from their initial audit to get all of their records and farm plans into place. Exact requirements vary slightly between species, but AWA generally requires:

A FARM PLAN REGARDING:

- Compliance with AWA standards
- Feeding and water
- Animal health management strategy
- Management of pasture
- Emergency procedures (natural disaster, etc.)
- Transportation

A RECORD OF:

- Traceability of animals, from birth to slaughter
- Any sale or transfer of certified animals or products
- What you're feeding the animals and how much
- Any close confinement of animals
- Any medication and treatment of animals and the reason for treatment
- Any mortality, morbidity and culling (including reason if known)

Note: Applications for Derogation

A farm or group of farms may apply through a Derogation Request Form to carry out a practice or use a substance that AWA standards generally do not permit. According to AGW, derogation is only granted in exceptional cases when the principles of the program are still met even if an individual standard is not.

Most of AWA's record-keeping requirements include things many farmers will already be doing, such as recording the dates of animal births, tracking medication use, and noting all animal sales or transfers. In addition to providing a record for AGW auditors to review, record-keeping helps producers spot trends on their farms and operate their businesses effectively by measuring key outcomes. AGW does not require records to be kept in any specific way. Farmers are welcome to keep their records the old-fashioned way, putting pen to paper in notebooks, logs or calendars. Similarly, AGW happily accepts Excel sheets and Word documents.

AWA's farm plans generally require more effort to put together than the daily record-keeping requirements but serve an important purpose on any farm. The various required plans function as an operating manual for the farm, covering everything from feeding plans and pasture rotation to biosecurity and what to do in inclement weather. AGW offers multiple [template plans](#) for farms to build off of, including species specific health plans, pasture, emergency and transport plans.



AWA CERTIFICATION PROCESS

AGW certifies independent farmers, cooperatives and producer groups of family farmers, and retailers, distributors and restaurants. The certification process described below applies to independent farms. Information about the certification processes for other entities can be found on the next two pages, and in further detail in the AWA Policy Manual.

STEP ONE

Review AWA Standards & Policies

- Read the AWA standards for the species you wish to certify and the AWA Policy Manual to confirm your farm will comply with relevant standards and policies.
- Confirm that your slaughter facilities are agreeable to being inspected for compliance by an AGW Slaughter Specialist.

STEP TWO

Submit Application

- Submit an application form and signed affidavit to AGW online or by mail.
- **Note:** AGW treats all information supplied by applicants, approved farms, slaughter facilities, or other businesses and groups as confidential.

STEP THREE

Schedule & Facilitate an Audit

- After you apply, an AGW Eligibility Coordinator will contact you to discuss certification. An AGW auditor will then contact you to schedule a visit to your operation to review your practices, records, facilities and animals. To learn more about the audit process, [click here](#).
- **Note:** AGW treats observations and information collected during the course of the audit as confidential.

STEP FOUR

Obtain Certification & Use Label

- The AGW Approvals Board will make a certification determination.
- You will only receive certification if you are 100% compliant with AWA standards.
- Certification is valid for a maximum of 18 months. You may use the AWA label/seal on your products for 18 months from certification notification.
- **Note:** You may appeal a certification decision or enter a dispute resolution process for other program concerns.

STEP FIVE

Recertification & Changes to Certification

- AGW conducts re-certification audits of member farms annually, with a maximum of 18 months between inspections. AGW will notify you of the date on which your next audit is scheduled.
- You are not required to submit an annual application unless there has been a change in the scope of your operation since your last application, in which case you would submit an amended application.
- Once certified, you must inform AGW immediately of any actions or material changes that could affect your ability to comply with the AWA standards, including if you change slaughter plants or start or stop using on-farm slaughter.
- **Note:** Your certification may be suspended or terminated for nonconformities, as set forth in the AWA Policy Manual (Part 3.4).

AWA SLAUGHTER CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Certified AWA farms must use slaughter facilities that have been audited by AGW, so it's beneficial for farmers and slaughter employees alike to understand the slaughter certification process. The certification process described below applies to processing and slaughter facilities.

STEP ONE

Review AWA Standards & Policies

- Read the AWA standards for slaughter and processing facilities to confirm that your facility will comply with relevant standards and policies.

STEP TWO

Schedule & Facilitate an Audit

- An AGW slaughter plant specialist will contact you to schedule a visit.
- **Note:** The farmer must give the slaughter plant specialist at least one month notice prior to the planned slaughter date to ensure the review process is carried out. Three month notice is recommended.

STEP THREE

Review Period

- If the slaughter plant specialist has any concerns about the suitability of the plant, they will supply a list of corrections.
- When the specialist is satisfied that the facility complies with AWA guidelines, they will confirm with the certification.

STEP FOUR

Obtain Certification & Use Label

- The AGW Approvals Board will make a certification determination and issue a letter confirming the facility's certification status.
- Approved facilities may use the logo along with the appropriate language on the facility's website/information provided to farmers.

STEP FIVE

Recertification & Changes to Certification

- AGW conducts recertification audits of slaughter facilities annually, with a maximum of 18 months between inspections. AGW will notify you of the date on which your next audit is scheduled.
- You are not required to submit an annual application unless there has been a change in the scope of your facility since your last application.
- Once certified, you must inform AGW immediately of any actions or material changes that could affect your ability to comply with AWA standards.
- **Note:** Your certification may be suspended or terminated for nonconformities, as set forth in the AWA Policy Manual (Part 3.4.5)

AWA Certification Process for Cooperatives/Producer Groups

The certification process described below applies to producer groups and cooperatives. AGW defines a producer group as “a group of farmers who work together but market some of their produce independently” and defines a cooperative as “a group of farmers who work together and market all their produce under one name or brand, mutually benefitting from the profits.” In cooperatives, one farmer is designated the liaison to AGW, while all the farmers in a producer group must communicate with the certification program.

Cooperatives. In a cooperative, only one person needs to submit an application, providing details about the entire group. The AGW Eligibility Coordinator then allocates the audits and connects with the liaison to schedule audits. The liaison will work to complete any corrective actions with farmers as necessary to obtain certification. The results of the audit will be shared with the farmer and the liaison. If any individual farms are suspended or require corrective action after certification, that farm must be excluded from the cooperative’s AWA branded supply until the correction is made, or the entire cooperative will lose its status. The liaison is responsible for keeping adequate records for the entire cooperative. (An AGW auditor should be able to trace the source of all the products being sold under the AWA label by the cooperative.)

Producer Groups. In a producer group, each farmer must submit an application and coordinate an audit for their farm. The results of the audit will only be shared with the farmer. (Producer groups may consent in advance to sharing individual audit results with the group.) AGW will work with individual farmers in the producer group to address any non-compliances before issuing the certification. Farmers are required to keep their own records as required by AWA standards.



AWA AUDIT PROCESS



Step 1
Facilities



Step 2
Animals



Step 3
Records

AGW conducts audits of facilities, animals and records to assess and potentially certify your operation's conformance with AWA standards and policies.

When Are Audits Required?

- **Initially:** AGW conducts an audit as part of the initial application process.
- **Annually:** After certification, AGW conducts audits annually (with a maximum of 18 months between inspections) as a part of certification maintenance.
- **Unannounced:** These may be triggered by major changes in how the farm operates, a complaint against a farm or to verify that a required change has been made.
- **For Program Assessment:** Periodically, AGW selects random member farms to audit (also unannounced) in order to assess the effectiveness and consistency of the AGW auditing program, as well as the performance of its auditors. Random audits may cover a full farm or just a particular species or management practice.

Who Conducts Audits?

- **Generally:** AGW employs approximately 20 auditors. Auditors are assigned based on availability, geographic location, knowledge and expertise.
- **Background & Training:** AGW auditors must have an agricultural science degree and be veterinarians or farmers with at least five years' experience in pasture-based management or a similar qualification. All auditors are required to attend a "new auditor training." After the initial training, each auditor is accompanied by a more experienced auditor during at least his or her first three audits. Every auditor is also required to attend yearly training programs. AGW Slaughter Specialists also have access to trainings provided by experts at Bristol University, UK.
- **Impartiality:** All AGW staff, auditors and board members are required to disclose any potential conflicts of interest and adhere to the AGW Conflict of Interest Policy. Further, an auditor is prohibited from conducting three consecutive audits on the same farm.
- **Management Reviews:** In order to maintain the program's compliance with ISO/IEC 17065 (which sets forth requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services), AGW conducts annual management reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of the auditing program as well as other aspects of the AGW quality management system.

What Happens During an Audit?

The audit process varies somewhat depending on the type of entity being audited. However, all audits are based upon AWA standards and ISO/IEC 17065, if applicable. (For information about the audit and certification process for specific kinds of business entities, review the AWA Policy Manual Parts 2 & 3.) Generally, the audit process involves the following steps:

Pre-audit: *Off-farm Activity*

- **First Contact.** An AGW auditor will contact you to schedule the audit visit. The auditor will ask questions to confirm the scope of the farm activity and the species to be audited and explain and answer questions about the audit process.



Audit Part 1: *On-farm Activity*

- **Discussion.** The auditor will meet with farm managers and employees to discuss their roles and responsibilities as well as their knowledge of key AWA requirements.
- **Observation of Procedures, Facilities, Animals.** The audit will observe the farm facilities and practices involved in housing the farm animals (if applicable) and the storage of feed and medicines. The auditor may also arrange to inspect storage and in-store handling of products. The auditor will also observe the animals, their physical condition and all of the practices involved in raising them. The auditor will carry out some welfare outcome measurements – e.g. body condition score, lameness, dirtiness, as part of the audit. The auditor may also arrange to inspect transport of livestock.
- **Review of Records.** The auditor reviews records related to the source of all meat and livestock products, the management of the farm business and other relevant AWA standards (see record requirements above under “AWA Standards”).
- **Exit Interview.** At the end of the audit, the auditor will meet with you to summarize his or her findings and provide you with an overview of the observed nonconformances, if any. During this meeting, you have the opportunity to provide corrections, clarifications and additional information.
- **Overall Length.** The length of the audit varies depending on the size and complexity of the operation. According to AGW, most audits take half a day to one day. Farmers are required to be present and available for the duration of the audit.

Audit Part 2: Slaughter Facility

AWA is a birth through slaughter program, and production and slaughter standards should be read in conjunction. For an animal product to be Certified AWA, the accredited animal must be slaughtered in a facility that has undertaken the AWA review process and met AWA's published slaughter standards. A Greener World states that the slaughter standards are rooted in science and represent achievable best practice, applying both to slaughter on the farm or in a separate plant. For example:

For red meat species, slaughter facilities must:

- Prohibit the use of electrical prods except as a last resort in the case of risk to health and safety of animals or employees
- Unload animals from transport vehicles within one hour of their arrival
- Render animals insensible on the first stun attempt, and re-stun immediately if any sign of sensibility is observed at any time after stunning

For poultry species, slaughter facilities must:

- Unload birds individually within one hour of the transport vehicle's arrival
- Slaughter birds within two hours of arrival at the plant
- Ensure that chickens are not inverted for more than 60 seconds before they are stunned/slaughtered (120 seconds for turkeys)
- Ensure that, if used, shackle lines not exceed 35 birds per minute

AWA slaughter standards also have requirements for transport to slaughter, both in terms of method and duration. For poultry, the maximum period of transport allowed is 4 hours, and for all other species the maximum is 8 hours. The slaughter facility review entails the same general steps as a farm audit, described above.

- **Process for a Separate Slaughter Plant:** If your slaughter facility is not on your farm, you must identify to AGW the slaughter facility you wish to use, discuss the AWA program with the facility and help to coordinate the plant inspection by the AGW Slaughter Plant Specialist (SPS). If the slaughter is not regularly conducted throughout the year, the SPS conducting the inspection must be provided with at least one month (three months is preferred) of notice prior to the planned slaughter. During separate slaughter facility audits, an AGW SPS reviews a plant's handling, stunning and slaughter practices, examining holding pens, alleyways, stunboxes and stunning equipment. The SPS will also review the facility's humane handling training requirements and operating procedures, which must be clearly recorded. After inspecting the facilities, the SPS will have a short meeting with the plant owner to discuss their findings. (The outcome of the review is completely confidential.) The entire process generally takes a couple of hours, depending on the number of animals and species at the facility.
- **Corrections:** If the Slaughter Plant Specialist has any concerns about the suitability of including a plant or on-farm slaughter facility in the AWA program, they will provide a list of needed corrections. In some instances, the SPS may decide that a plant or on-farm facility will never be suitable for the AWA program given the extent of nonconformance or its management structure.
- **Compliance Confirmation:** The SPS produces a review report and collects any corrective actions required of the plant. This information is reviewed by AGW and when the program is satisfied that the slaughter facilities and conditions comply with AWA requirements, the plant will be sent a letter confirming compliance and the farm(s) that wished to use the plant will be informed.

Post-Audit: *Follow-Up & Corrective Action*

- **Determination.** Once the results of both the farm and the slaughter inspections have been obtained, AGW will make a determination based on published AWA standards.
- **Corrective Action Plan.** If AGW deems that you have correctable nonconformances, it will provide you with a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) form identifying and describing them. You must complete and return the CAP within one month, describing the steps you have taken or will take to correct the nonconformances and a schedule for doing so. The AGW Approvals Board will not grant certification until all compliance concerns identified on the CAP have acceptable corrective actions.
- **Program Assistance.** AGW has employees who will work with you to develop your CAP and make necessary changes.
- **Denial.** If your farm is denied certification, you must wait six months before reapplying. If your farm is denied certification due to an administrative termination, such as losing an approved slaughter facility, you may reapply at any time. If a violation is severe, AGW may refuse reapplication to the program entirely.



Additional Audit Information

For additional information on the AWA audit process, review AWA Policy Manual Parts 2 and 3 and the following Annexes:

Corrective Action Plan Flow Chart	Annex 9
Conflict of Interest Policy	Annex 1, Part A
Register of Staff and Board Members Interests	Annex 1, Part B
AWA Management Review Procedure	Annex 20

AWA LABEL USE GUIDELINES



Label Approval. When a farm is certified by AWA, it may begin using the appropriate AWA label or seal on its products.

- If animals have been raised on Certified AWA farms and slaughtered at Certified AWA plants, their meat and hides may carry the AWA label.
- If dairy animals are raised on Certified AWA farms, their milk may carry the AWA label.
- Fiber from animals on Certified AWA farms may carry the AWA label.

Label Requirements. As a general matter, the AWA label must be reproduced from original artwork directly obtained from AGW. The label's use must also be:

- Complete and upright
- In proportion to the product description
- Clearly visible
- Legible over the whole of a background
- On the main face of the label or packaging

USDA-FSIS Label Approval. As described in the [USDA-FSIS section](#), prior to using the AWA label, approval by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS) is required.

Additional Label Use Information

For more information about the use of AWA's label and seal, review AWA Policy Manual Chapter 4 and the following Annexes:

General Label Use	Annex 25
For Those Not Directly Accredited by AWA	Annex 13
For Slaughter Facilities Approved by AWA	Annex 14
For Multi-Ingredient Products	Annex 25
For Agricultural Products and Equipment	Annex 27
Dual Production and Sale of Product	Annex 26

AWA MARKETING SUPPORT

A Greener World provides free marketing support to Certified AWA farmers. According to AGW, its marketing, public relations and outreach teams have the capacity to assist you by:

Marketing Your Farm

- Writing and distributing press releases about your farm
- Featuring news about your farm on AGW's website, blog, print newsletter and press releases
- Listing your farm and retailers offering your products on AGW's online searchable database

Facilitating Networking and Events

- Helping you develop relationships with retailers, restaurants and farmers markets
- Hosting events to promote your products
- Attending conferences or workshops with you to help improve your and the program's visibility

Providing Marketing Materials

- Offering materials to help promote your certification, including brochures, signs, hats, aprons and other marketing materials available for purchase
- Providing you free signage (metal gate signs and farmers market banners available)
- Providing reduced cost [AWA egg cartons](#)



Offering Marketing Advice

- Supporting your online marketing, social media ([Guide to Using Social Media](#)) and more traditional forms of marketing
- Supporting you with label design and USDA-FSIS approval
- Resources on using photos for marketing purposes ([Taking Pictures of Your Farm](#))

For more on AGW marketing support, visit the [AGW Marketing Support Webpage](#).

AWA COSTS

AWA has an initial application fee and annual audit fees. The below is a fee schedule for Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW.

Applicant-Specific Fee	Cost	Description	Date Due
Application Fee	\$100*	One-time, non-refundable fee for all program applicants	Due at the time of application submission
Audit Fee	\$90 < 10 acres \$100 10-40 acres \$110 40-100 acres \$120 > 100 acres	Non-refundable fee to help cover the cost of audit. Must be paid in full prior to farm audit.	Due prior to the farm audit, both initial and annual. Invoices will be sent three months prior to expected audit date.

**Discounts available for multiple certifications.*

To review AWA's full fee schedule, [click here](#).

Transition Costs. Additionally, there may be costs associated with transitioning a farm to meet AWA standards in preparation for an application for certification. For more information on funding available to afford some of these transition costs, see [Transition Funding Opportunities](#).

KINDERHOOK FARM

Ghent, New York



Animals grazing on Kinderhook Farm.

Operation Profile:

- 400-500 Black Angus and Red Devon cattle
- 400 Dorper sheep
- 450 laying hens
- 500 broiler chickens
- 4 heritage breed pigs & 30 piglets

Certification: Certified Animal Welfare Approved by A Greener World (beef cattle, sheep, laying hens)

Background

Kinderhook Farm is situated on over 1200 acres in Ghent, New York, that were previously used for a conventional dairy operation. Along with business partners Steve and Renee Clearman, who bought the land, farmers Lee and Georgia Ranney have transformed the property into a grazing farm. Today, the Ranneys raise Black Angus and Red Devon cattle, Dorper sheep, laying hens, broiler chickens and heritage breed pigs. Kinderhook Farm's products are sold at its farm stand and to restaurants and smaller retail markets throughout New York.

According to Georgia, Kinderhook Farm employs an intensive rotational grazing system, providing their cattle and sheep with a 100% grass and legume diet. She says they grow and harvest hay on their farm to feed the cattle and sheep during the winter, and use Maremma and Akbash livestock guardian dogs to protect their animals from predators – namely a significant coyote population.

Getting Certified

Kinderhook Farm is certified by Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) for its beef cattle, sheep flock and laying hens. Kinderhook Farm first sought AWA-certification in order to maintain an existing, valuable business relationship. It was selling beef cattle to Grazin' Angus Acres (GAA), a farm in Ghent owned by Dan and Susan Gibson, when GAA sought and received AWA certification. By AWA standards, GAA was then required to purchase only Certified AWA animals. Kinderhook Farm obtained AWA certification for its cattle and have since pursued and received certification for most of its other species. (Kinderhook Farm is currently seeking certification for its broiler chickens. Georgia says the farm has not been able to certify its pigs because it has not found an AWA-certified seller of piglets, but hopes to overcome that constraint in the future.)

According to the Ranneys, by the time the farm sought AWA certification, it was already largely compliant with AWA requirements. To achieve certification the Ranneys only had to make “minor tweaks,” like removing certain ingredients from their feed for broiler chickens. (Georgia reports that AWA's Corrective Action Plans have always been manageable.)



“We feel that it’s important to be part of a program that provides third-party auditing, and shows our customers that we are dedicated to the highest possible welfare standards.”

A closer look at the cattle on Kinderhook Farm.

AWA Certification Outcomes

Enhanced Marketing & Branding. The Ranneys use the AWA label as an independent validation of their practices. They use the label on the farm’s website, newsletter, egg cartons, brochures and farm store signs.

Marketing Support. According to Georgia, AGW also provides tremendous marketing support to increase the reach of AWA products. This support includes providing member farms with AWA labels and brochures, and listing all members on the AGW website.

Better Record-Keeping & Farm Awareness. Georgia believes that keeping records for AWA certification will add value to any farmer’s business. First, the business will be better organized. Second, strong record-keeping practices serve as a valuable avenue for tracking and understanding the status of animal stocks.

Support Meeting Welfare Standards. The Ranneys have found the AGW audits to be very rigorous. However, Georgia notes that in her experience, “AGW wants to help you achieve or maintain certification. I believe that their inspectors have deep understanding of how animals should be raised, including recent developments in animal husbandry.” As a result, AGW has been willing to assist in developing a plan for needed changes. In that regard, she has found AGW “extremely easy” to work with.

Why Certify with AWA?

Georgia believes AWA certification is one way of giving consumers confidence that they are supporting a farm whose livestock is being raised according to AWA’s high animal welfare standards. Georgia also notes the importance of transparency: “Especially in light of recent videos of animals being subjected to abuse by workers in factory conditions, we feel that it’s important to be a part of a program that provides third-party auditing, and shows our consumers that we are dedicated to the highest possible welfare standards.”



An example of Kinderhook’s welfare-certified product.

CENTRAL GRAZING COMPANY

Lawrence, Kansas



Animals grazing at the Central Grazing Company farm.

Operation Profile:

- ≈ 1,000 sheep
- Partners with 19 farms across the United States

Certification: Certified Animal Welfare Approved by A Greener World (sheep)

Background

Jacqueline Smith and ReGina Cruse purchased their 80-acre farm in northeast Kansas to raise sheep as a means of promoting prairie restoration while allowing the sheep to “live natural and instinctive lives.” The surrounding land had formerly been used for crop and hay fields, leaving the soil depleted of nutrients. To restore the prairie and mimic the natural predator/prey relationship, Jacqueline and ReGina holistically graze their 150 sheep by rotating them among different areas. This practice allows the grasses to develop longer root systems, making the land more resilient to extreme weather events. The farm has been Certified Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) by A Greener World (AGW) since its founding in 2015.

Prior to purchasing this land, Jacqueline was a certified AWA dairy sheep farmer. When her original dairy sheep operation expanded, the number of lambs also increased, but Jacqueline realized there was no market for them. In response, she created Central Grazing Company to clean up the supply chain and sell the animals into the pastured meat market rather than put them up for auction and increase the chance they would end up in feedlots.

Central Grazing Company began operating with two farms—including Jacqueline and ReGina’s—and approximately 75 sheep. It now works with nineteen different farms across the country to aggregate, brand and distribute lamb to wholesale and retail markets. Last year, it processed over 700 sheep and anticipates it will process approximately 1,000 this year.

To find farm partners, Jacqueline and ReGina reach out to sheep farms that are already Certified AWA, or they are contacted by farmers who want to supply to Central Grazing Company and may or may not already be Certified AWA. Jacqueline works with potential farm partners who aren’t currently Certified AWA to help them achieve that requirement. If the farms are not raising their sheep on grass, they must also agree to make that change. Jacqueline works closely with the AGW program throughout the process of certifying potential farm partners. While she does not see what specific corrective measures AGW has suggested, she does know if the farms become certified and when they are audited. Once a farm has earned AWA certification, Jacqueline personally visits the farm to ensure that it meets Central Grazing Company’s specifications. The farms that contract with central Grazing Company receive 50% of the company’s net profits and are paid competitive market rates for their lamb.

Central Grazing Company adheres to several goals that guide its operations: (1) raising lambs ethically; (2) regenerating grasslands; (3) creating economic incentives for “independent, regional, or organic farmers”; (4) providing livable wages; and (5) building a “traceable supply chain.”



“The networking and resulting partnerships have allowed Central Grazing Company to grow and scale up in a manner that is consistent with the company’s goals.”

Getting Certified

When deciding on an animal welfare certification, Jacqueline looked into other programs but decided on AWA because of its “higher” standards that align with her values. Jacqueline has always respected AWA’s strict guidelines and its alignment with Central Grazing Company’s mission and goals.

Jacqueline, among other farmers, finds the audits to be rigorous, but noted that the auditors are friendly, respectful and understanding. For example, when AGW visited Jacqueline’s farm, the auditor noted that the farm did not have the breed of animal appropriate to the type of operation she was running, as she had dairy sheep rather than meat sheep. Jacqueline was able to explain that she was culling the animals naturally; she had dairy sheep remaining from her previous farm but once they were culled, she would introduce meat sheep to the farm. In addition, she was able to negotiate a feeding requirement that met the needs of her animals. In her experience, providing information to AGW prior to a farm visit can make the process more efficient.

AWA Certification Outcomes

Benefits to Animals. Central Grazing Company was founded to ensure that lambs would not enter the feedlot system. By requiring that supplying farms become Certified AWA, Central Grazing Company ensures that higher welfare standards are applied across a larger number of farms. As the company scales up, so does the number of AWA-certified farms.

Marketing Access. Central Grazing Company markets its lamb as Animal Welfare Approved on its website, promotional materials and packaging. Because the AWA certification is considered the most rigorous, Jacqueline and ReGina have found that they are able to differentiate their products and increase market share over their competitors. Due to its certification, Central Grazing Company is also a gold partner with Natural Grocers, a national retail chain.

Identifying Networks of AWA Farmers. Jacqueline cites the ability to identify networks of certified AWA farms as one of the greatest benefits to certification. The networking and resulting partnerships have allowed Central Grazing Company to grow and scale up in a manner that is consistent with the company's goals.

Why Certify with AGW?

Central Grazing Company became Certified AWA by AGW to further its goal of raising sheep ethically while restoring grassland and promoting networks of small farms that support local and regional economies.

CONSIDER BARDWELL FARM

Rupert, Vermont



Animals grazing on Consider Bardwell Farm.

Operation Profile:

- ≈ 200 goats (including milk goats and meat goats)

Certification: Certified Animal Welfare Approved by A Greener World (goats)

Background

Angela Miller and Russell Glover's 300-acre farm is named after Consider Stebbins Bardwell, the farmer who established Vermont's first dairy cooperative on the same land in 1864. At the time, small farmers in the region sold their milk to Bardwell, who made it into cheese and sold it in markets as far away as New York City.

Angela and Russell bought the farm intending to revitalize that tradition by raising their goats on Vermont Organic Farmers (VOF) Certified Organic pesticide and fertilizer-free pasture to produce raw milk for their award-winning cheeses. The farm began operations with just nine goats; this year, it milked 125 goats. As a dairy business, Consider Bardwell Farm primarily raises milking goats, but also raises some bucks for meat.

Angela and Russell also work with nearby farmers who pasture dairy cows on Consider Bardwell Farm's land, and they have a production contract with the neighboring farm to purchase cow's milk for use in their cheese.

Angela and Russell use an intense rotational grazing system for their goats, moving them every 12 hours on a 60-day cycle. This prevents the goats from eating the grass down to the point where they are more likely to come into contact with parasites and require medication. According to Angela and Russell, their herd has been largely free of parasites for seven years. After the goats move pastures, dairy cows move in and graze in the same areas, as they are less susceptible to the same parasites.

Consider Bardwell Farm's cheese is sold wholesale across the United States, directly at one farmers market in Vermont and in 13 different Greenmarket Farmers Markets across New York City. Greenmarket management was a driving force in getting Consider Bardwell Farm Certified Animal Welfare Approved (AWA).

Getting Certified

Angela and Russell first heard about the AWA certification program in 2009 at a presentation hosted by Greenmarket. The Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), which presided over the AWA program at the time, gave a talk about the certification process. After the presentation, Angela flew to Washington, D.C., to meet with AWI in person and learn more about the program. AWA certification seemed to be a natural fit for the farm because of its mission to be environmentally sustainable and keep animals in a system that is as close to nature as possible.

When they began the certification process, Angela and Russell had to make minor changes to their farming practices. However, they found the certification process to be relatively simple, especially with AWI's support and encouragement.



AWA Certification Outcomes

Benefits to Animals. Angela and Russell believe the Certified AWA standards helped raise their awareness of better ways to handle animals. To become certified, Consider Bardwell Farm was required to make some minor changes to infrastructure to benefit the goats. Angela states that she learned that goats are healthiest and the least stressed if they have a specific minimum square footage of space per individual. In addition, Angela and Russell appreciate that the AWA certification makes it difficult to scale up an operation without ensuring that the animals are well cared for. For example, when considering whether to keep a larger herd to increase milk and cheese production, they have to take into account whether they are ready to increase the size of their barn.

Marketing & Consumer Interest. Consider Bardwell Farm promotes its farm as Certified Animal Welfare Approved on its website and in promotional materials. According to Angela, AWA certification increased their sales, as they get marketing and public relations support through A Greener World's (AGW) newsletters and publications. In addition, the Greenmarket strongly encourages vendors to seek AWA certification. While customers do not seem as concerned about the AWA certification for Consider Bardwell Farm cheeses, the certification does play a large role for customers that purchase meat from the farm.

Support Meeting Welfare Standards. As with other farms that are Certified AWA, Angela found the AWA audits to be rigorous, but added that the auditors are fair and knowledgeable. She and Russell also noted that the AGW program works hard with farmers to ensure they are compliant. Consider Bardwell Farm also worked with AGW to apply for—and receive—one of its previously available Good Husbandry Grants and used that funding to build rolling goat houses.

Why Certify with AGW?

Angela and Russell became Certified AWA to reflect their commitment to the animals they raise and provide as natural an environment for them as possible.